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Honduras

EXPORTER GUIDE ANNUAL

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Report Highlights:

United States Exporters enjoy an enviable position in the Honduran market and it has improved after the implementation of the CAFTA-DR agreement in 2006. The Honduran retail sector is by far the largest market for imported food, due to the expansion of supermarkets in urban areas. The HRI sector is developing rapidly and has a tremendous potential for processed products.

Post:

Tegucigalpa

Executive Summary:

I. MARKET OVERVIEW

A. Economic Situation

The Honduran economy has diversified in recent decades and now has a strong export-processing (*maquila*) industry, primarily focused on assembling textile and apparel goods for re-export to the United States, as well as automobile wiring harnesses and similar products. These industries employ about 130,000 Hondurans, out of an economically active population of 2.8 million. Despite the recent economic diversification, there continues to be a large subsistence farmer population with few economic opportunities. Honduras also has extensive forest, marine, and mineral resources, although widespread slash-and-burn agricultural methods and illegal logging continue to destroy Honduran forests.

The value of remittances is higher than the revenue generated from the maquila industry (primarily geared to the assembly for re-export of textiles and apparel) and tourism. Remittances represent over a quarter of GDP or nearly three-quarters of exports. The Central Bank of Honduras reported that remittances decreased 13.1% as off August 2009 in comparison to the 9.6% growth registered during the same period in 2008. The drop in remittances is attributed to the economic crisis and to unemployment in the United States. Honduras' real GDP decreased 4 percent in 2008 in comparison to the 6.3 percent growth in 2007. This is primarily because of external price shocks and the effects of the global economic slowdown. Inflation has gone up about 11.4 percent in 2008. The increase has been mainly in food prices. The banking system has been strengthen by alliances with international banks.

Foreign direct investment was US\$877.0 million in 2008 it reflects a reduction of 5.6% in comparison to the \$929.3 million in 2007. In 2006, Honduras completed all of the requirements to qualify for the benefits connected with the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. Since 2005, Honduras has received nearly \$4 billion in debt relief from bilateral and multilateral donors. The donor community estimated this would reduce annual debt service payments by about US\$200 million in 2007. In January 2007, the Inter-American Development Bank pledged an additional U.S.\$.1 billion in debt relief.

The United States is the chief trading partner for Honduras, supplying 52 percent of Honduran imports and purchasing approximately two-thirds of Honduran exports. The largest U.S. investments are in the garment assembly sector, tropical fruit production (bananas, melons and pineapple), tourism, energy generation, shrimp farming, animal feed production, telecommunications, fuel distribution, cigar manufacturing, insurance, leasing, food processing and furniture manufacturing. More than 184 American companies operate in Honduras, including ninety-four U.S. manufacturing operations, forty U.S. franchises and approximately fifty other types of industries.

B. Market Growth

Exporters from the United States enjoy an enviable position in the Honduran market, and saw this position improve after the 2006 implementation of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR), which was signed by the

United States, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic in August 2004. Honduras was the second country to ratify CAFTA-DR, which entered into force for Honduras on April 1, 2006, one month following El Salvador and the United States. CAFTA-DR eliminates most tariffs and other barriers for U.S. goods destined for the Central American market, provide protection for United States investments and intellectual property, and creates more transparent rules and procedures for doing business. CAFTA-DR also aims to eliminate inter-Central American tariffs, and facilitates increased regional trade, benefiting U.S. companies manufacturing in Honduras.

Over the past decade, United States exports to Honduras have increased both in terms of absolute dollar value and in terms of market share. Strong prospects for exports of goods and services are extensive and include: franchising; food processing and packaging equipment; hotel and restaurant equipment; processed foods, auto parts and transportation machinery; travel and tourism services; printing and graphic arts equipment; safety and security equipment; electrical machinery; and electrical power generation/renewable energy equipment.

U.S. exports to Honduras in 2008 were U.S.\$4.8 billion, up approximately 9 percent from the previous year. Honduran tariffs on most goods from outside the Central American Common Market (CACM) are currently within the zero to 15 percent range. With CAFTA-DR in effect, about 80 percent of U.S. goods can now enter the region duty-free, with tariffs on the remaining 20 percent to be phased out within 10 years.

Overall Central America and Honduras enjoy relative stability, growing economies and proximity to the U.S., all of which make these markets attractive for United States exports. Regional integration should spur investment, growth, trade and continued market opportunities for U.S. firms in coming years.

C. Market Opportunities and Competitiveness

The strengths, market opportunities and competitiveness of U.S. suppliers are illustrated in the following table:

ADVANTAGES	CHALLENGES
·	Direct competition from other Central American countries, as well as Mexico and Chile.
investments and intellectual property, and creates more transparent rules and procedures for doing	·
Consumers have strong preferences for U.S. products. U.S. products enjoy a high-quality image among Hondurans. Importers prefer trading with U.S.	The current economic situation in the country limits purchasing power and customers are price sensitive.

exporters because of reliability.	
investment are fast food outlets, casual dining restaurants and introduction of new U.S. hotel chains, tourism, including investment in the Bay Islands and	Relative high duties on some products, inconsistent customs valuation practices and import procedures make it more difficult to enter the market.
permitted the year-round availability of U.S. fruits	Unclear and occasionally restrictive zoosanitary and phytosanitary import requirements.

II. EXPORTER BUSINESS TIPS

A. Business Customs

The Honduran government is generally open to foreign investment and welcomes it. Restrictions and performance requirements are fairly limited. Relatively low labor costs, proximity to the United States market, and Central America's best Caribbean port (Puerto Cortés) have also made Honduras increasingly attractive to investors. Puerto Cortés, the largest deep-water port in the region, is the first port in Latin America to qualify under both the Megaports and Container Security Initiatives (CSI), which now make approximately 90 percent of all transatlantic and transpacific cargo imported into the United States subject to prescreening prior to import.

Under CAFTA-DR, U.S. investors enjoy, in almost all circumstances, the right to establish, acquire, and operate investments in Honduras on an equal footing with local investors. In the investment chapter of the CAFTA-DR, Honduras committed to provide a higher level of protection for U.S. investors than under the 2001 BIT The local banking system is traditionally conservative and generally extends only limited amounts of credit, though looser monetary policies and increased competition from regional and international banks including HSBC and Citigroup led to an expansion of consumer credit in 2007. United States exporters that offer attractive financing terms on sales to Honduran traders have the best chance of gaining market share.

As in most Latin American countries, a good personal relationship with prospective customers is basic to penetrate the market. While it may take a little longer to establish a business relationship than is customary in the United States, the investment in time can pay off in long-lasting and mutually profitable alliances. Although a United States firm may export directly to Honduran companies, U.S. suppliers are strongly recommended to have a local representative or distributor to personally travel to Honduras.

B. Consumer Tastes and Preferences

In recent years, Hondurans' preference for U.S. products has increased tremendously. The number of U.S. franchises operating in Honduras has grown rapidly. About 60 foreign firms now operate in Honduras. Most of these firms are U.S. fast-food and casual restaurants. In addition, Hondurans traditionally prefer the quality, convenience and wholesomeness of American products. Some companies are combining Honduran and American foods as an attractive tool.

Some of the positive market entry factors found in Honduras includes a high receptivity to U.S. goods and services.

C. Food Standards and Import Regulations

In Honduras, most import license requirements have been eliminated. Among the general documentation required by customs are commercial invoices, bills of lading, and certificates of free sale. Import documentation may be prepared by a local customs house broker or by an importer with sufficient experience in completing the documents.

Demonstrating Eligibility for Preferential Tariff Treatment

In general, a product's eligibility for preferential tariff treatment may be demonstrated in a variety of ways provided it is in written or electronic form. One can provide a statement on company letterhead, a statement on a commercial invoice, or a certification. While no official form is required in order to demonstrate eligibility for preferential tariff treatment under CAFTA-DR, a certification should include the following information:

- (a) the name of the certifying person, including, as necessary, contact or other identifying information;
- (b) tariff classification under the Harmonized System and the description of the good;
- (c) information demonstrating the origin of the product;
- (d) date of the certification;
- (e) in the case of blanket period certification, the time period over which the certification is applicable.

In some situations, multiple shipments of identical goods are being sent to the same CAFTA-DR importer. In these cases, it is not necessary to create a new written or electronic certification for each individual shipment. The importer may maintain one "blanket" certification to be presented to the customs authority, if requested. The "blanket period" may not exceed one year.

To see a sample certification for exports to Honduras, please visit http://www.export.gov/FTA/cafta-dr.

The Honduran government requires that a sanitary registration be obtained from the Ministry of Health for all imported foodstuffs, and that all processed food products be labeled in Spanish and registered with the Sanitary Regulation Directorate (SRD) of the Ministry of Health. Some U.S. businesses have complained that delays in the process of granting these permits hamper their ability to import products into Honduras. United States companies have also reported that these regulations are not always strictly enforced for Honduran companies. This may place U.S. companies that comply with the regulations at a disadvantage.

Sample of the product when analysis is done prior to registration. Products are divided in three risk areas:

Category "A" for products in the highest risk. These products are the easiest to contaminate and are consumed by a great number of the population. The category includes the following products: raw, cooked, canned meat and cold cut meats, eggs (powder and liquid), mil (powder and liquid), cheese, cream, butter, yogurt, bottled water, ice and raw, cooked, frozen, pre-cooked seafood. Foodstuffs from Group A such as meats, canned meat, milk, and yogurt need laboratory analysis. Imports of raw and processed agricultural products need an import permit given by the National Plant and Animal Health Service (SENASA) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock.

Category "B" is medium risk, such as flour, sugar, salt, ice cream and honey. Foodstuffs from Group B are subject to further analysis.

Category "C" has the least risk, such as candy, oils, margarine, non-alcoholic beverages, canned fruits and vegetables, nuts, cereals, and soups. The registration process is relatively faster for those low-risk products within Group C, which does not require laboratory analysis.

In order to obtain an import permit, all importers of food products, additives, and inputs used in food processing must submit the following documents to SENASA:

- Phyto or Zoo-Sanitary Import Permit Request provided by SENASA
- Certificate of Origin
- Pro-Forma Invoice
- Pre-Application of Inspection

SENASA requests the issuance of a Phyto or Zoo Sanitary Certificate by a United States federal government authority (FSIS Inspector) in the plant where the food products have been processed. SENASA does not accept documents from commercial trading companies. SENASA has requested USDA to add an Additional Declaration (AD) to the phyto certificates for poultry imports. The AD provides an indication that specific poultry or sub-products have originated in areas free of high or low pathogenic avian influenza. The Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) also provides regular updates to local government authorities in connection to the origin of disease outbreaks within the United States. SENASA typically issues an import license within 72 working hours when all required documents are provided.

For detailed information on import license requirements, please contact FAS Tegucigalpa at aghonduras@fas.usda.gov. Alternatively, U.S. exporters may contact SENASA and the Ministry of Health offices by visiting the following websites: http://www.dgrs.gob.hn http://www.dgrs.gob.hn/

D. General Import and Inspection Procedures

Product Registration. Registration of a food product is done at the Ministry of Public Health through the Regulations Department and must be carried out by the legal representative of the importer. All processed food products must be registered and be issued a sanitary registration number, prior to their entering the country. Only samples, to be used for the registration process, will be allowed to enter the country otherwise. The Regulations Department requires, for product registration, a Certificate of Free Sale which must be authenticated by a Honduran Consulate in the United

States. The Regulations Department allows for up to 40 working days to process a product registration. It is important to keep in mind that the legal representative should go regularly to the Regulation Department to follow up on the registration process.

Labeling Requirements. Labeling requirements are also set by the Ministry of Public Health through the Regulations Department. Labeling requirements for merchandise in general are established under Article 9 of the Consumer Protection Law, Decree 41-89 of 1990. Enforcement of marking and labeling regulations is conducted by the General Directorate of Production and Consumption of the Ministry of Industry & Trade. Special regulations also apply to medicines and agricultural products under the Health Code and the Phyto-Zoo Sanitary Law, respectively.

In general, labels of all consumer-oriented products are required to include the following basic information:

- 1. Name of the product
- 2. Name of the manufacturer
- 3. Country of origin
- 4. Sales price
- 5. Elaboration and expiration dates
- 6. Net content
- 7. List of ingredients
- 8. And any applicable health warnings

Additional Requirements. Food products must also adhere to the following requirements, among others:

- 1. Labels may be made of paper or any other material that can be attached or permanently printed on the package or container.
- 2. All writing on labels shall be made in a clear and legible manner and shall not fade under normal use. All inscriptions should also be made in Spanish.
- 3. When applicable, the label must state: "keep frozen", "for immediate consumption after opening", "artificial", "treated with radiation".

Legally, products cannot be imported into Honduras with just the standard U.S. label. Stick-on labels are allowed to fully comply with Honduran labeling requirements on product information, but not to indicate the manufacturing or expiration date. Labels must be affixed prior to customs clearance and at the time of product registration, in the way the product will be sold. Stick-on labels for the manufacturing or expiration date are not accepted because they can easily be altered.

Although the import process is fairly clear for practically all products, certain difficulties often take place with sensitive products such as poultry meat. United States suppliers should ensure that their Honduran customers are fully aware of

and in compliance with all import requirements. Imports of poultry products must come with an FSIS Certificate (Form 9060-5) with an additional declaration indicating: "the poultry product or sub-product originates in areas free of high or low pathogenic avian influenza". USDA APHIS, regularly provides updates to SENASA as to which States have suffered outbreaks of diseases and what their current status is. However, SENASA has indicated that it is the importers' as well as the exporters' responsibility to keep it updated about the health status of the area where the product originates.

At the port, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock has delegated to the Regional-International Organization for Animal and Plant Health (OIRSA) the responsibility of all quarantine inspections and treatment of agricultural imports. OIRSA's Plant and Animal Protection Service (SEPA) follows SENASA guidelines for requirements of raw material and processed foods imports. The SEPA Inspector, a Customs Inspector, and an Enforcement Official of the Ministry of Finance are usually involved in clearing imports of food products. In order to expedite customs clearance, all the information pertaining to the import of food items should be in Spanish. Product labels not in Spanish must be accompanied by a Spanish translation.

Prior to granting Customs clearance, the SEPA Inspector will conduct the appropriate inspection of the product. Shipments of food products with an import permit approved by SENASA are normally granted Customs clearance in a short period of time, ranging from a few hours to two or three days (depending on the work load at the port). Shipments of food products that were not registered with SENASA prior to import and do not have all the required documents are normally detained at the port of entry where product sampling is conducted. The samples will later be subject to laboratory analysis to check the physical, chemical and biological characteristics of the product.

For additional information on Import Permissions you can access at the following websites http://www.senasa-sag.gob.hn:8080/senasaextranet and http://www.senasa-sag.gob.hn/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=112&Itemid=75

III. MARKET SECTOR - STRUCTURE AND TRENDS

A. Entry Strategy

U.S. exporters should keep in mind the relatively small size of the Honduran market and the high elasticity of demand for consumer products when devising marketing strategies.

Price is one of the most important elements that influence the receptivity score of most Honduran imports. In many cases, Honduran business people buy directly from abroad if they feel that the cost of imports available in the local market is too high. United States exporters should carefully analyze both the cost approach and the market approach when making pricing decisions.

U.S. exporters that offer attractive financing terms on sales to Honduran traders have the best chances of gaining market share. This is particularly true for large-scale projects. It is important to emphasize, however, that international firms must exercise due caution when granting credit to Honduran trading partners. Firms should investigate the creditworthiness and reputation of potential partners before granting credit.

The category of other consumer oriented products comprises a wide range of products, which have witnessed significant increases in the past few years like vegetable and animal oil/fats, pop corn, preparation for sauces and sauces, spices, mustard.

Other consumer-oriented products offering good export opportunities are snack foods, packaged and canned foods, breakfast cereals, food additives, dairy products, wine, and pet foods.

Under CAFTA-DR, the tariff on a wide range of consumer-oriented products was eliminated. Market demand for U.S. products in this sector looks promising.

B. Food Retail Market

Honduras' retail food sector is by far the largest market for imported food. Retail sales of imported consumer-oriented products are conducted mostly by supermarkets, mini-markets and convenience stores. The supermarket retailing industry is growing rapidly. Supermarkets have opened stores in various urban locations and most of the regularly employed population takes advantage of promotions and buys their food at these supermarkets. Many supermarket chains are expanding, remodeling, and modernizing.

Easter, besides being a religious holiday, is also "summer vacation" time for the vast majority of Hondurans. This vacation period begins well before and extends well beyond the two-day holiday. Christmas gift baskets are also increasingly popular. In recent years, it has become common to include a high percentage of U.S. products in the basket. Most commonly included are traditional favorites such as wines, whiskey, candy and nuts. Easter and Christmas are the main peaks for retail sales. In addition, in June and December of every year the government and private sector by law provide a bonus to their employees. This bonus is equivalent to a month's salary. Many families make special purchases or buy quality products at that time.

Various marketing approaches could be developed for the different sectors. It is always important to appoint a local distributor in Honduras that can provide good market presence. However, many U.S. suppliers are discouraged by small initial volumes, and do not provide the needed support. United States exporters looking to establish and maintain a share of the market should be willing to go the extra mile in developing sales from the ground up and servicing their customers. They should work with their customers to satisfy local manufacturing and expiration date requirements, provide their customers with competitive pricing, credit alternatives, catalogs, and samples to test the market. They should also be willing to consider sharing advertising cost for launching new brands. Moreover, they should also be willing to provide technical and sales support as well as training in various areas such as category management, merchandising, and product handling.

C. Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Sector

The tourism industry in Honduras has had substantial growth because the Government of Honduras (GOH) and the private sector are much aware of its enormous potential.

- Total visitors increased from 1.14 million in 2006 to 1.34 million in 2007
- Food and drink establishments increased in 5,381 in 2007

- Hotels establishments increased in 949 in 2007
- US Dollar income from tourists increased from US\$552.0 million in 2007 to US\$630.8 million in 2008
- Cruise ship visitors increased from 297.4 thousands in 2007 to 434.2 thousands in 2008

Whether for historic attractions, sporting activities, or relaxation, tourism plays a significant role in nearly all of the Central American economies, and has stimulated growth in the hotel and restaurant industries. Equipment and supplies to support this sector are therefore in great demand.

The hotel industry is rapidly expanding into urban and rural tourism. Among the new projects include bungalow-type resorts, apartment-hotels, cabins, hostels and inns. Convention traffic is also increasing. The restaurant industry is growing at an even faster rate. Many first-class restaurants, fast-food chains and franchises are opening due to attractive incentives. Honduras has the largest amount of established U.S. fast food and casual dining franchises in Central America. The development of modern shopping malls and commercial centers has prompted the establishment of an increasing number of restaurant businesses.

With CAFTA-DR, more than 80 percent of U.S. exports of consumer and industrial goods enter duty free, with the remaining tariffs phased out over 10 years. CAFTA-DR also mandates the establishment of a more secure, predictable legal framework for U.S. investors in Central America.

The Tela Bay project is a major priority in the country's tourism development strategy. The Project, known as Los Micos Beach and Golf Resort, is located in Honduras within driving distance from San Pedro Sula and La Ceiba, two of its three largest cities. The property set aside for the project covers 312 hectares of land with beach, forest and lagoon access. It is majority owned by the Honduran Institute of Tourism. The physical, social and cultural characteristics of the project zone, in addition to its careful planning, give the Tela Bay project everything it needs to become a sustainable tourism destination where profitability and nature are well balanced. This Project first phase is conceived as an international 250 keys four-star hotel; a 150 keys international five-star hotel; an eighteen-hole signature championship golf course (PGA grade) and its clubhouse; a real estate program consisting of four hundred and thirty seven residential units. Additional amenities include a retail village, an equestrian club & private beach clubs for the real estate component among others. Areas have also been set aside for recreational activities, administration and public services. All development criteria have been designed to remain flexible.

The U.S. franchises are in need of raw materials, and the local market can not always fulfill their needs. Also, some of the franchise agreements require U.S. raw materials as part of the contract. The following U.S. franchises and casual dining establishment operate in Honduras:

Antonino's Pizza
Applebee's
Burger King
Church's Chicken
Dominos Pizza
Little Caesar's
McDonald's
Papa John's

Pizza Hut

Popeye's

Ruby Tuesday's

Subway

Tony Roma's

T.C.B.Y.

T.G.I. Friday's

Wendy's

Price Smart

Domino's Pizza Bojangles

Cinnabon

Espresso Americano Marriott Hotel

Crown Plaza

Start Mart

D. Food Processing Sector

The total market for food processing in Honduras has increased steadily over the past few years and further increases are expected in the years to come. The United States continues to be Honduras' largest supplier of food processing enjoying a high level of acceptance and reputation for high quality.

Honduran exporters are pursuing expansion plans to increase production and improve the quality of their exports, particularly non-traditional agricultural products such as melons, watermelons, mangoes, winter vegetables, shrimp, jalapeno peppers, and fruits and flowers. With CAFTA-DR, producers are looking forward to opportunities of exporting new products to the American market. Every day, more and more companies are offering processed products such as tortillas, processed wheat, soy or oats, dehydrated fruits and vegetables.

IV. BEST CONSUMER ORIENTED PRODUCTS PROSPECTS

The following is a list of product categories with the best export potential for U.S. suppliers based on recent export performance, relative ease of entry, and developing trends.

Product Category	2008 Imports (U.S.\$ in thousands)	5-Yr. Avg. Annual Import Growth (%)	Import Tariff Rate	Key Constraints Over Market Development	Market Attractiveness for USA
Snack Foods	15,205	151.8	All U.S. snack foods are tariff free.	Competition from El Salvador and Guatemala	 Close proximity to the U.S.
Read Meat, Fresh/Chilled/Frozen	25,783	29.58	Immediate tariff elimination of Prime and Choice cuts. All other tariffs on beef and beef products will be eliminated within 15 years.		 Consumers have strong preferences for U.S. products. 0% duty for US

				-		
Poultry Meat	6,703	18	All Central American tariffs on poultry and poultry products will be eliminated within 18 years. chicken leg quarters are at 0% within Quota.	Competition from: Canada and Costa Rica	•	Rapidly developing retail & HRI sector.
Eggs & Products	1,139	68	Eggs & Products are tariff free	Competition from: El Salvador, Costa Rica and Panama		presence and growth of U.S. fast food
Fresh Fruit	13,327	62.4	Almost all U.S. fresh fruits are tariff free. Except for Oranges (10 yrs)	Competition from: Chile, Mexico, Guatemala, Costa & Rica	•	Tourism is growing at a fast pace.
Processed Fruit & Vegetables	13,873	70.3	All U.S. vegetables are tariff free. Except the followings: Frozen Vegetables (10 yrs); Mixed Vegetables (5 yrs).	Guatemala, Mexico, Costa Rica, Nicaragua,	•	Developing Food Processing Industry needing quality ingredients
Tree Nuts	573	248.7	All tree nuts are tariff free.	Competition from: Guatemala, México Costa Rica Customers are price sensitive		

Data BICO System

V. POST INFORMATION

Office of Agricultural Affairs, American Embassy

Avenida La Paz, Tegucigalpa, Honduras Phone: (504) 236-9320 ext. 4354, 4544

Fax: (504) 236-8342

E-mail: <u>AgTegucigalpa@fas.usda.gov</u>

For more information on exporting U.S. agricultural products, please visit the Foreign Agricultural Service home page: $\underline{ http://www.fas.usda.gov}$

VI. KEY CONTACTS

Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (SAG)

Blvd. Miraflores, Ave. La FAO

Tegucigalpa, Honduras Phone: (504) 239-8394 Fax: (504) 231-1921

http://www.sag.gob.hn

National Animal and Plant Health

Inspection Service (SENASA)

Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (SAG)

Blvd. Miraflores, Avenida La FAO

Tegucigalpa, Honduras Phone: (504) 231-0786 Fax: (504) 231-0786

Ministry of Health

3 Calle, 4 Ave,

Contiguo Correo al Nacional

Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Tel. (504) 222-8518, 222-5771 Ext. 1055

Fax: (504) 222-5226 http://www.salud.gob.hn

Ministry of Health

Regulations Department

Anexo número 1, esquina opuesta a

Farmacia Regis

Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Tel: (504) 237-2726 Fax: (504) 237-2726

Email: regulacionhon@yahoo.com